



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk (860)441-6640  
Town Manager  
(860)441-6630

## Meeting Minutes

### Representative Town Meeting

**Moderator Rita Schmidt**

**Representatives Joe Baril, Tom Barnhart, Lori Bartinik, Alicia Bauer, Genevieve Cerf, Michael Collins, Syma Ebbin, George Edwards Jr, Peter Fairbank, Robert Garcia, Patrice Granatosky, Dolores Harrell, Debra Jenkins, Carole McCarthy, Kevin McMahon, Richard Metayer, David Miner, Deborah Monteiro, James Moulding, Scott Newsome, Nora Patterson, Deborah Peruzzotti, Joy Plunket, Robert Post, Kevin Power, Don Pratt, Mary-Ellen Schefers, Eleanor Scussel, Jack Sebastian, Jennifer Smuts, Eleanor Steere, Fritz Stein, Joan Steinfeld, Irma Streeter, Mark Svencer, Patti Thunberg, Cheryl Tilney, Tom Vivirito, Robert Walker Sr, and John Wheeler.**

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**Tuesday, February 21, 2006**

**6:00 PM**

**Groton Senior Center**

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**SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

*The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm by Moderator Rita Schmidt.*

**2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Moderator Schmidt, Rep. Barnhart, Rep. Bartinik, Rep. Collins, Rep. Ebbin, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Harrell, Rep. Jenkins, Rep. Metayer, Rep. Miner, Rep. Monteiro, Rep. Moulding, Rep. Patterson, Rep. Peruzzotti, Rep. Plunket, Rep. Post, Rep. Power, Rep. Pratt, Rep. Sebastian, Rep. Smuts, Rep. Steere, Rep. Stein, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Svencer, Rep. Thunberg, Rep. Tilney, Rep. Vivirito and Rep. Walker, Sr.  
Members Absent: Rep. Baril, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cerf, Rep. Edwards, Jr., Rep. Fairbank, Rep. McCarthy, Rep. McMahon, Rep. Newsome, Rep. Schefers, Rep. Scussel and Rep. Wheeler, Jr.

**3. NEW BUSINESS**

**2005-0311 FYE 2007 Budget**

**Discussed**

*Moderator Schmidt and Mayor Watson opened the meeting.*

*Mayor Watson explained that the budget process has been underway for months, but the Committee of the Whole recently took action on budget guidelines just days before the budget is scheduled to go to the printer. Mayor Watson stated that the budget is the Town Manager's document, but the Town Council can provide guidance. He then read an opinion from the Town Attorney indicating that the Town Council can not compel the Town Manager to submit a budget in a certain amount, although the Council can provide guidance. (A copy of the response is attached.)*

*Mayor Watson called the joint meeting to seek input from the RTM. Moderator Schmidt expressed concern that the mandates of the Charter must be followed. The Town Council can give guidance, but the budget is the Town Manager's budget and it should address the needs of the Town.*

*Representative Sebastian suggested that the Town Manager needs help with objectives to assure efficient operations. Moderator Schmidt noted that countless RTM committees review the budget with staff.*

*Representative Vivirito suggested that direction was already given to the Town Manager when RTM leadership appeared before the Town Council. The Town Manager should be given the authority to do his job; he will not do anything contradictory to the health and welfare of the Town. Representative Vivirito stated that he does not want to see the RTM cut out of the budget*

review process and he assured the Council that the RTM will do its due diligence in finalizing the budget.

Representative Patterson suggested that the Council should have more faith in the Town Manager and Town departments. Many people do not want to see services cut. Representative Patterson stated that the RTM will do a thorough review of the education budget as well. She noted that the Town Council does not represent every district in Town, but the RTM does.

Representative Thunberg noted that education represents 60% of the overall budget and she noted that Dr. Mitchell was not present.

Representative Barnhart stated that the Council must abide by the Charter. The Council appointed Town Manager Oefinger and he should be allowed to prepare a budget that supports Town operations. Elected officials have a responsibility to their constituents to show them what it takes to run the Town. Groton is not the only community that relies on property taxes. Still the Town must provide a strong educational base. Representative Barnhart expressed his full faith and confidence in the budget process and cited Sections 6 and 8 of the Town Charter regarding budget responsibilities.

Representative Granatosky disagreed with the Committee of the Whole's action and the notion that Town government should be run like a corporation. She expressed support for the Town Attorney's opinion, which respects the Charter. She questioned the Town Council's intent based on the opinion rendered by the Town Attorney.

Councilor Bond stated that she understands the Town Council can not direct the Town Manager, but it can provide guidance. She asked when the Town Attorney was asked to review this issue and Mayor Watson stated last week. Councilor Bond noted the wording of the resolution that states that the Council expresses its "desire" that the Town Manager present a zero dollar increase budget. She further added that this is the same process that was followed last year and she questioned why the guidance is not acceptable this year.

Mayor Watson stated that he does not have to obtain the Council's permission to seek an opinion from the Town Attorney. The Council has given guidance to the Town Manager in the past, but the difference this time is the expressed "desire" that will result in drastic cuts. That type of guidance must be given during the process. Councilor Bond stated that the Town Council should be able to provide guidance to the Town Manager and it is his choice whether he follows it or not.

Representative Smuts suggested that perhaps the Council was wrong last year too. She stated that year after year of zero increases ties the RTM's hands. The Council is moving far away from what is best for Groton. A zero increase budget cuts out part of the process and it should be stopped now.

Representative Pratt asked if the Council would have a problem with the Town Manager coming in with a level service budget, and Councilor Bond responded no. Representative Pratt expressed concern with how professional a budget can be prepared at this late date.

Councilor O'Beirne stated the Town Council is the legislative body of the Town. The Town Manager works for the Town Council at the pleasure of the Town Council. The Town Council has been giving budget guidance to the Town Manager for years. The guidance has been followed by the Town, and ignored by the Board of Education. Councilor O'Beirne stated that guidance should have been given in November or December. He noted that there are three separate bodies involved in the budget process and it is designed so that two out of the three bodies can constrain the budget so it doesn't get out of control.

*Councilor O'Beirne noted in the FYE 2005 budget, where the guidance was "level service", the Town returned over \$800,000 or 3.6%; the Board of Education returned \$234,000 or one-third of 1%. In FYE 2004, the Town returned 2.75%; the Board of Education returned \$6.00.*

*Councilor O'Beirne reiterated that the Council has the right to provide guidance and the Town Manager has the right to return to the Town Council if he doesn't like the guidance. However, less than one-third of the budget is actually under the Town Manager's control.*

*Representative Moulding stated the Council is placing the Town Manager in a no win situation and giving direction, not guidance. He noted that the Council conducted a very public evaluation of the Town Manager.*

*Councilor Sheets noted that the Town Manager asked for guidance and it is too bad that the Council provided it so late. The Town Council has a duty as the Town's legislative body to do what's best for the Town. She read the proposed resolution and noted she will propose an amendment that includes benefits in the guidelines.*

*Representative Collins noted that if the Town Manager complies with the Council's direction so late in the process, the RTM can not add money back in, which circumvents the process.*

*Representative Monteiro noted that the RTM was not consulted about what directed the budget should take and there has been no dialog between the RTM and town Council. She expressed concern with how late in the process guidance has been given and stated that it should have been done a long time ago and perhaps a meeting should have been held with the RTM. With respect to the suggestion that the Town Manager needed to inform the Council that he needed guidance, Representative Monteiro recalled many times when the Town Manager did just that and he is still waiting. The budget process needs to start earlier and there needs to be more dialog between the RTM, Town Council, and Board of Education. The Town Manager is a professional and the Council should not tie his hands. The Manager should present a budget that is beneficial to the Town and the Town Council can then decide what to cut if they so desire.*

*Representative Ebbin echoed her colleagues' comments, noting that the Town Manager is being "put between a rock and a hard place." She suggested that all nine Councilors have pet programs. The Town Manager should be allowed to do his job. The Town Council can then make cuts, and the RTM can do what its constituency wants.*

*Councilor Bartinik questioned how the constituency would vote if the budget were put to referendum. Representative Pratt suggested that the community is split down the middle, considering the phone calls he has received. Representative Barnhart stated that the budget process is about fiscal responsibility, not cuts or increases.*

*Representative Smuts stated that she has no problem with the Town Council providing guidance, but a zero dollar increase leaves no room for the budget process. She expressed support for Groton's form of government and she is happy that we do not have a budget referendum.*

*Representative Svencer stated that everyone must do their own part in the budget. The Council's direction in effect says to the Town Manager, "You make the cuts so we don't look bad."*

*Councilor O'Beirne noted that the Council has been giving guidance to the Town Manager for years. He asked what is different this year other than the timing.*

*Representative Granatosky stated the Town Manager works for the Town of Groton. The Town Council decides whether he continues to do that job. What is different this year is that every year the budget has become tighter. There is no room to make more cuts because the budget is already*

very lean. Because this direction has come so late in the process, the RTM has had enough. Since the Town Council evaluates the Town Manager, the Council has put him in a very difficult position. Representative Granatosky suggested that the Town Council is not acting on behalf of everyone in Town. She noted that the RTM's comments were bipartisan. The Council can not expect the Town is continue to operate effectively with a zero dollar increase budget.

Representative Steere stated the Town Council is addressing the problem too little too late. She stated that she attended and was welcomed at every Board of Education budget session. The Town Council should likewise allow RTM committee members to sit in on budget sessions with the Town Manager. Town employees would appreciate a dialog. Representative Steere stated it is too late now, but the Council could plan for next year's budget process.

Councilor Bartnik stated there is no need to argue about the Charter; there is always a battle over spending. The majority rules. The Town Council is more conservative now and it would be dangerous to change the Charter because the RTM doesn't like to majority opinion.

Representative Miner stated there is a myopia in cutting the budget and it is not the panacea everyone believes it is. Groton is a multi-faceted town. Past budgets have resulted in positions being cut and reserves being depleted. A level budget maintains services; a zero dollar budget means positions.

Representative Vivirito noted this discussion is creating a rift rather than leading to thoughtful consideration on how to attack the budget. He suggested that the process be followed this year, and it if doesn't work, it can be changed for next year.

Representative Monteiro stated that the RTM does not exist only to restore funds. The RTM is as concerned about the impact on taxpayers as the Town Council, but there must be fiscal responsibility.

Representative Jenkins noted that the Town Council's resolution references the RTM, but the RTM was not part of the process so that is a misrepresentation.

Mayor Watson stated that the resolution can be amended by vote. He stated he would make a referral about meeting with the RTM in the fall.

Representative Granatosky stated that there was not a consensus of the RTM on budget guidance and she asked that the reference to the RTM be removed from the resolution.

#### 4. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Rep. Miner, seconded by Rep. Vivirito, and so voted unanimously at 7:18pm.

Attest:

Barbara Tarbox, Town Clerk  
Clerk of the RTM

Nicki Bresnayan  
Executive Assistant to the Town Manager